



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service (EAS)

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees

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Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. We have a drug and alcohol free workplace policy. However, it is not against the policy to have an alcoholic drink at lunch in a restaurant. Couldn't someone with a high tolerance drink heavily, but show no signs of intoxication on the job?

A. It is true that an employee with a high tolerance might have a fairly high blood alcohol level and not appear intoxicated. The intoxication might go unnoticed because of the absence of behaviors that might trigger suspicion. Presumably your policy commits the organization to act decisively in response to employees whose work performance or behavior is not appropriate, even when alcohol does not appear to be a factor. Supervisor referrals to EAS for performance issues may identify and salvage employees with an alcohol problem or many other problems. Be sure to call your EAS office if you have questions or concerns about an employee and to help make your referral more effective.

■ Q. I consulted with an EA professional and subsequently decided that a disciplinary action against my employee would be appropriate. Should I tell the employee that EAS supports the disciplinary action?

A. Although you received management consultation services and subsequently decided to take a disciplinary action, EAS, your Employee Assistance Program, does not play a role in either endorsing or disapproving of your decision. Violating this principle would erode the organization's trust for the EAP's objective, problem-solving role. This is an important point in EAP theory. Endorsing your decision would align the EAP with the disciplinary action. Opposing your decision would likewise undermine your ability to manage effectively. EAPs must maintain a neutral role so they can attract both non-supervisory and supervisory employees. You should own your decision entirely, and not reference the EAP. To do otherwise will alter the perception of the EAP's neutrality and abuse its credibility. This could damage its value, making it less attractive and less effective.

■ Q. I have postponed addressing my employee's attitude problem for many years. I admit that not confronting her has made the problem worse. Is it possible to confront her and expect changes after such a long period of time?

A. "Bad attitude" can mean many things, so first clearly define what behaviors constitute this specific bad attitude. Although it will be difficult to step in suddenly to intervene with your employee's behavior, it is possible. Begin by considering exactly what behaviors you want changed. Write them down and assign a degree of importance to each. Just as important, define their cost to the organization. Do they cause morale problems? Lost productivity? Work errors? Hold a corrective interview and discuss the changes you want. Provide the rationale for change, but be candid with your employee if she asks why you are suddenly requiring her to change. Explain how you've postponed confronting her, but that your priorities have now made the changes in her conduct necessary. Do not ignore any future behavior problems, or you will reinforce her problematic behavior. Be sure to praise her for any progress you see.

■ Q. I admit I get irate and yell at my employees when they don't perform properly or do what I want, or when they question my authority. I am very frustrated with myself. What can I do to gain control over my emotional response to my employees?

A. There could be some belief or condition that is contributing to your emotional responses. Getting emotional may be effective, but it's not practical because the intimidation keeps your employees from acting to build a more effective relationship with you. Examine your beliefs for clues that could explain your reaction. Ask yourself, "What must I believe in order to act this way?" Do you feel unsupported by management? Do you doubt your skills and abilities? A health care problem could also be a factor in the emotional basis of your reaction. EAS can help you examine any of these possibilities and more. Try keeping a journal of your responses. On each occasion when you react inappropriately, record what stimulated your response. Record improvements in controlling your reaction with each subsequent event. Also record what you will do on the next occasion to alter the behavior.

■ Q. I believe in the value of EAPs, but not so much in supervisor referrals. If someone can't perform, I'll replace him. If an employee visits the EAP, great, but that's their decision. Why isn't this a common sense approach to employee problems?

A. Washington State established the Employee Advisory Service because it recognized that not every personal problem that interferes with job performance would be amenable to resolution without professional help. Indeed, employees with certain medical conditions may slowly deteriorate in their ability to perform over many years, but have no clue as to what is fueling their work problems. In such instances, denial and blaming others are natural ways of dealing with reality. These employees could be some of your best performers if their personal problems were identified and effectively treated. Many such personal problems are very treatable. The simple step of making a supervisor referral based upon performance problems is all it may take. Helping your organization preserve its resources, and reducing the headaches of turnover, are clear reasons for using your EAP as a management tool.

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Visit EAS on our website at:
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